VOICES

by

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A COLLECTION OF POEMS, POEMS THAT TELL STORIES

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DEDICATION

To Taiyelolu Olayimika rest easy, rest on.

I hear voices...

PREFACE.

Writing has served me well and has been of immense benefit; a panacea in distress, a medium of self-purgation and a harbor in the midst of turbulence. Words have and will always be a powerful force bearing creative and curative qualities while retaining an inherent capacity to convey emotion and paint pictures.

This collection of poems titled “Voices” is the product of many trips to dark and solitary corners both of free will and compulsion. Eventually, one uncovers the mystery in the irony that the quietest of places often bear the loudest sound.

“Voices” is officially upon us. Welcome to a place, somewhere ranging from but not limited to the top of a mountain and the deepest part of a valley.

The first set of poems are an expression of concern for the nation, Nigeria while the next set of poems progress from general to personal stories.

YEWANDE ADEBOWALE

LAGOS, 2016.

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CHANGE

We clamored for change

With desperate voices of urgency

Exhausted with the cyclic order of insurgency

We clamored for change

The era of post-colonial failure

Must birth a new order of change

Emancipating those bound in chains

Like Oliver twist we asked for more;

Better standard of living

Having enough, enough to go round giving

Failed promises, lying lips

Politics and politicking all over the place

Tears and suffering boldly inscribed on every face

We hoped it would get better

In an era of “change”

Till I bought a small tuber of yam for 500 naira without change

The voices that once chanted “change”

Are now silent

Hardship and inflation have refused to relent

The value of the naira has weakened

Once a thousand naira is broken

Its pieces become a token

Patience is a virtue

While we watch women wail

While our feet fail

It will get better

Fifty-six years and counting

Still waiting

They promised us “change”

We have seen the fuel price

We have seen the rise in the cost of rice

This change is too much

Can no longer afford the bus

The boss can no longer afford us

This change is too much

IN DAYS NOW HERE

As the sun goes slowly blind

As day gives way to night

Does the earth bring forth works of the nocturnal kind

To light

As the sun goes slowly blind

Do the fears of days past pervade my mind

And I, finding myself more lost in my own eyes

For I have become habituated to blood and cries

In days bygone

We lived without fear of a stray bullet

From the end of a gun

Or from rampant attack by armed children of night with the insatiable gullet

Those who have shed the last shred of innocence

The last vestige of shyness and despoil without conscience

In days now gone, inhabitants of the north

Could practice the religion of colonialists of the west as in the south

Without apprehension

Of an abrupt visitation

Into the bosom of the messiah

Although being the desire of every believer

Messengers of death pluck in their prime

By crime

Those who are ripe for death and those who are not

In this web of bigotry are we caught

In days bygone

The sound of firecrackers did not set our minds affray

Back in the day

The sound of fireworks did not bear a striking similitude in sound to bombs

Mere sounds did not remind us of sobs

This air I breathe reeks of despondency and doom

For I cannot find safety even behind bolted doors of my own room

The next sound may be boom! Who knows who the next victim may be

It may be you, it may be me

How much I envy the bliss of the numb creature

For reality

Being too thorny for my noble nature

In this world is much cruelty

I wish I could wink and make it all go away

This cannot hold sway

For reality does not tango to the tune of tiny tots

Or even of noble thoughts

How long shall one continue in battle against reality?

We all lie as victims in the hard hands of insecurity

If life is a stage, it is time to play our part

For our dear nation is fast drifting apart

If we continue to steer this chaotic course

Even by faith there shall be no recourse

This nation shall be as catastrophic as titanic at sea

No more bloodshed, this is our plea

How much I mourn the loss of days bygone

In days now here, what lies the fate of the one, unborn?

CORRUPTION

Part 1.

Seed of destruction did you sow in every noble mind

Sense of self is unknown, light we cannot find

Fruits of the viable seed abound in every nook and cranny insight

This epidemic spreads with the speed of light

To the male and female, young and old, you are an acquaintance

You reign supreme with no opposition or resistance

Hero is your name, for you does everyone save the last dance

Fragile minds fidget in the strength of your presence

To the reprobate, ignoble and incorrigible, you are the reason for their existence

The vein of their essence

Your roots plunge deeper with each feat

Those whom you defeat serf at your feet

Allegiance and diligence do they pledge

To a conception with no life, we cannot challenge.

Part 2.

Our leaders should have known better

But they have not been loyal to the letter

A deal with you they struck

With a rise to the privileged position they could not believe their luck

Now they treat us like those whose foreheads are tattooed fool

We have been used and dumped as a worn out tool

With our funds do they move from pillar to post on tour

While the masses live in misery and squalor

With the cat out, their nakedness is an open secret that I know for sure

For they have bitten the fingers that fed them

And have despised and blotted us out like phlegm

Our funds do they siphon to accounts unknown overseas

For their generations yet unborn do they keep the proceeds.

Part 3.

The lamentation of a bereaved youth.

This leaves a bitter taste on my tongue

And sorrow in my heart, for justice I so earnestly long

They have put innumerable innocents to death

Forced to confess, they should be tied to the earth

For the loss of my brothers and sisters on that ill-fated road

Will you pay you repulsive toad

For the millions whose hopes and dreams you have usurped and destroyed

Wicked ones! Your days are numbered, with blood your hands are soiled

I speak for the destitute and prostitute, male and female, young and old

Thou have neglected us, your generations shall pay a thousand fold

For this grave injustice meted on us

We are depressed, repressed and dehumanized; we no longer have a voice

For what I plan to do, I refuse to be judged by you

For thou hast led the way and I have taken the cue.

THE SPIRIT OF LAGOS

A spirit indomitable

A will that cannot be broken

Eko Akete ilu ogbon*

These streets teach wisdom

On the streets of Lagos are all sorts of people

Those who are always in a hurry who have places to go

Work to do

The mother; striving to make ends meet

The life bearer spreads her wares on the street

Hoping for customers

So Tope and Sade will have food to eat

The father whom his children look up to

The bread winner

Goes out and does not take no for an answer

He must make ends meet

For he has many mouths to feed

The struggling people are all over the streets of Lagos

Those unwilling to give up without a fight

Whose faces are as hard as rock

With a will unshakable as a deep rooted iroko tree

These people are willing to succeed

They seek to do it the right way

But they are vulnerable

Desperation makes people so

Capable of succeeding or caving in to pressure

Then the last set of people

Who have by desire

Chosen to be the least

Laws are made because of them

They are the ones who have responded harshly to life

And are willing to vent

Their frustration on others

They are the promoters of vice

They are the perpetrators of vice

They appear in different forms

Some are young, some are old

Some are poor, others are rich

Beneath it all

They are all the same

Some are politicians, some are touts

Some are robbers, some are petty thieves

Some are pastors, some are doctors

In all walks of life, they are found

These people are a danger

To themselves and others

They are all over the news

They are those who have by desire

Chosen to be the least

They are also found in Lagos

As in the rest of the world

Still, the spirit of Lagos lives in me

The spirit of a fighter

A spirit that can never be broken

From disappointment, I weave hope

From adversity, I create my possibilities

Which bring prosperity

I am not easily broken

Unwilling to give up

The spirit of Lagos lives in me

A spirit that can never be broken

Eko Akete ilu ogbon

These streets teach wisdom.

---

*Eko akete ilu ogbon (Yoruba) means Lagos the land of knowledge

OWAMBE*

Buba, iro, pele, gele*

Titilope ready for ode*

Asake dressed to kill;

Oleku*

Ah! Ole ju*

These lagos girls are something else

Those heels as high as olumo*

Ajani well clad in agbada*

Fila; abeti aja*

Shining shoes

Alaga*

These Lagos people are something else;

Oleku

Ole ju

Saturday turnup;

Owambe

Painting Lagos in all shades of red

Purple, yellow, green

Music blasting

Forget all sorrows

Get to the dance floor

Dance like there's no tomorrow

Who knows if there is anyway;

Owambe

---

*Owambe (Yoruba) is a popular saying meaning party time. It is often said that there is no party like a Lagos party.

* Buba, Iro, Pele, gele (Yoruba) these are clothes worn by Yoruba women. Buba means blouse, Iro means wrapper, pele is worn over the buba and iro on one side, gele means headgear

* Ode (Yoruba) means event or party

* Oleku (Yoruba) originally a style sewn by Yoruba women, sophisticated and sexy. The word 'Oleku' used loosely can also mean dressed to kill.

*Ole ju (Yoruba) an exclamation, meaning it's too much

*Olumo (Yoruba) is the name of a mountain, located in Ogun state of Nigeria

*Agbada (Yoruba) is a piece of clothing worn by men over their dansiki (shirt) and trousers

*Abeti aja (Yoruba) is a traditional cap which by virtue of its triangular flaps is humorously named after large dog ears

*Alaga (Yoruba) means chairman. It is common for men to be saluted in that manner

GANGAN*

The party is never complete

Without the ancient drums

Speaking soothing soulful sounds

Gangan

Talking drum

Gangan

With each beat

I hear the voices of my ancestors

The stories left untold

Of chivalry and virtue

Stories of how

Balogun led the troops to victory

And how Adewale ruled well in his time

Gan gan gan

Hands to shoulders

Bent knees

Legs prepared for bata*

I hear my ancestors calling me

As deep calls out to deep

*Gangan (Yoruba) means talking drum, it is an ancient drum common to the Yoruba's used to communicate deep mysteries.

*Bata (Yoruba) is a Yoruba dance. It involves the use of the shoulders, hands and legs

EWA AGOYIN*

Two white stallions

Strong and sculpted

Ready for battle

Like a pen in the hands of a ready writer

Beneath the stallions, the eyo*

Stands in full regalia

Stationed at its duty post

Before brass gates

I heard deep calling out to deep

The aroma of ewa agoyin

Calling me back to my roots

I battled against the urge

To eat by the streets

Robed in the attire of the learned

I battled strongly

Against the scent of freshly baked agege bread

I battled till I could battle no more

Weakened to my roots

Yielding to the call

A call too strong to be ignored

Location: Tafawa Balewa Square, Odo Iya Sidi*

Lagos.

---

*Ewa agoyin is originally a Togolese dish adapted by Nigerians. Ewa (Yoruba) means beans while Agoyin is a term used to describe people from neighboring countries like Benin Republic and Togo.

*Eyo is a masked dancer that comes out during the eyo festival. The word 'eyo' refers to costumed dancers.

*Odo iya Sidi (Yoruba) means Sidi's mothers canteen

A PLACE WHERE DREAMS LEAD

Take me to a place where dreams lead

To the Olumirin waterfall*

Let me drown all my sorrows

Communing with Osun the river goddess

Take me to a place where dreams lead

To Obudu*

While I stand at the peak of the mountain

To tell the tales of how I overcame

Take me to a place where dreams lead

To Olumo*

Let me hide within the rocks

That sheltered my ancestors during war

Take me to a place where dreams lead

To Gembu*

To enjoy the tenderness of nature

In a land most peaceful

Take me to a place where dreams lead

To the Kajuru castle*

To enjoy harmony

As Europe greets Africa

Take me to a place where dreams lead

To the heart of the Niger delta

To the oil city

Home of affluence

Take me to a place where dreams lead

To the ancient city of Sokoto*

To bask in the Sahara

As I step on the sands of history

Take me to a place where dreams lead

Through the rivers and the creeks

The thick forest and the desert

To a place I call home

---

* Olumirin waterfall is a seven step waterfall located in Erin ijesha, Osun state, Nigeria

* Obudu is a local government area in Cross River state, Nigeria popularly known as the hub of Nigeria's tourism

* Olumo rock is a mountain located in Abeokuta, Ogun state, Nigeria. Abeokuta (Yoruba) means "under the stone". The town derives its name from the rock

* Gembu is a town located along the mambilla plateau of Taraba state, Nigeria having a cool temperature all year round

* The Kajuru castle is a castle with a medieval structure located in Kaduna state of Nigeria. The castle was built by a German and doubles as a hotel and a tourist centre.

* Sokoto is located in north western Nigeria, known as the seat of the caliphate

OSHODI*

As the iron snail approached

Blaring its horns

Traders hurriedly removing their wares from the way

Behind the barb wires stood a sign

A sign in green and white;

Oshodi

People everywhere even atop trains

Overcrowded bus stops

Busy streets

Fighting and bickering

Pick pocketing

Swift strides on the streets

Oshodi;

Bags carefully clenched tight

Straight faces senses alert

Valuables neatly tucked away

Hands in pocket, a sharp object

This is oshodi, anything can happen

---

*Oshodi is a place in Lagos, located within Lagos mainland.

VOICES FROM THE ABYSS*

I wake up in the morning sounding like a cosmic colossal catastrophe

About to unfold

I wake up every morning with a different voice

On some days I sound like agbero* Gbenle

On a day alomo* fraternizes with igbo*

On some other days I sound like the crescendo in the cock crow

On a day the cockerel is smitten with sore throat

On some days I sound like Spider and Rosco

On the day they broke bottles in a fight

Somewhere between Gambari and Patey*

I wake up each morning with a different voice

Maybe it's because

Sometimes during the night, I see myself

Cutting through the icy streets of the abyss

I witness the birth of Spider who was once Ayomide*

Born prematurely into polygamous penury

I witnessed the metamorphosis from larva to pupa

Caught in a web of neglect

Reeking of rotten decadence of decades

I see Abeke at fourteen with baby Abdul Rasak now

Rosco;

Thrust violently into delinquency by pressures of sudden acclamatisation

Hence, the need to belong to a family

He never knew one as he grew

He watched as Scorpion defended his boys

In a way his father never defended himself

I wake up each morning with a different voice

The one given by the streets I have walked on

Voices struggling to find expression from

The icy streets of the abyss.

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* Agbero (Yoruba) is the name given to local thugs who go around collecting money from bus drivers and conductors

* Alomo is the name of a brand of traditional alcoholic bitters

*Igbo (Yoruba) means cannabis or weed

*Gambari and Patey are the names of streets within Lagos Island, Lagos Nigeria

*Ayomide (Yoruba) is a name meaning, my joy has returned

THROUGH MY EYES

Into the mirror

Into the abyss

Into the depth of the deepest part of my soul

I see through my eyes

A reflection that was once mine

The pressures

The demands

The lofty expectations never to be disappointed

I see the person I used to be that I no longer am

I see a reflection that was once mine

The worry lines on the face

The wrinkles on the skin

I watch as beauty fades like fame fast found

Found, lost

I see a reflection that was once mine

Lost in the wilderness of a daydream

A different time and place

Of immense joy, tremendous laughter

Lost, found

I see a reflection that is mine

THE MASK

If life is a farce all have to perform

In all truth it is such a grueling task

For I am burdened beyond capacity

Weary am I of wearing this mask

Beneath the mask

Lies a desire

Lies a need

Lies a craving

Lies an addiction

Beneath the veil

Lies a true nature

A suppressed being

Buried tensions

Beneath the façade

Beneath religion

And all it represents

Lies a raw nature

Beneath character

Beneath morality

Lies a fire

Extinguished by all these

The mask, the veil

The flimsy façade

Beneath the drama

Lies a heart

Prone to fear.

If life is a farce all have to perform

In all truth, it is such a grueling task.

SOLITUDE

Anxiety obstructs the vent of creativity

As talent can only be nurtured in tranquility

With the overpowering voices of my education and dogma

Rash public opinion, an unfriendly aroma

In time past, my inner voice was drowned

I was lost and could not be found

Solitude, in your presence do I forget the crossness of men and of things

Feeling just as relaxed as trees swayed by wind

Listening to the bird as she sings

You are no foe, no fiend

In your presence have I found my spark

Which has drawn me out of the dark

Beneath your wings do I find solace

No pressures, only peace in this place

NO MUSIC, NO COLORS

Inspiration is low

Feeling so moody

My longing is for beat and lyrics

Plugged into my senses

Music, sweet music

No music, no life

It all just seems so dull and lifeless

Seems just like black and white today

Even the skies seem to feel my pain

The clouds are about to give rain

Cries of lamentation and woe

For inspiration is low

With music I come alive

Even my very soul rejuvenates with life

Life is bearable, pain is sweet

When there is music, there is life

Music, oh! Music

Music! Beautiful music

Music which cured mad men back in the day

And drove insanity from their way

Come fill my soul with enough rhythm

To last even an age without a song

I am willing to wait so patient and long

To find the rhythm within my soul.

RAIN

Droplets of water fall from the sky

The rain from on high

My fears come to life

As the anxiety of a new wife

The plants dance to this rhythm with ease

Created by the drumming of leaves of trees

The wind, doing the honors

Blowing the horns

Welcoming the rain is the earth

With all her worth

Grateful for a much deserved interlude

From the tyranny of the scorching sun most crude

All of nature bow in submission

The clouds are making a rendition

Eulogizing the prowess of the rain

The dust, servant most loyal without gain

Following suit

In preparation for this regale visitation, clearing the route

All that are alive know what it means

All that are experienced know what it brings

We are yet to recover

From the rape of our last encounter

You took away all we held dear

Destroying everything both far and near

In a second world, a twofold experience

A twofold nightmare replete with ghosts

For those on the islands and coasts

The flood, the loss

The rain is back

My heart in sync with the pace

Of a determined athlete on a race track

Laced with worry are the lines on my face

Even the rain from my eyes are about to drop

A silent prayer, a humble plea for it to stop

For I know what you bring

The flood, the loss, this snare

A living nightmare.

SLEEPING GIANT

Dear sleeping giant

Wake up

The day is here

The one you spoke of yesterday

Dear sleeping giant

Wake up

The time has come

The one you have been waiting for

Dear sleeping giant

Wake up

The pressures that forced you to sleep

Will remain even when you wake

Dear sleeping giant

Wake up

You are not an ant

Bigger than the elephant

Dear sleeping giant

Wake up

You will not fall

No need to fear you will not fail

Dear sleeping giant

Wake up

You have slept for far too long

We need you today.

TODAY

Today, I am a spectator

On the stage of life

Today, I am a student in a classroom

Lectured by another

Today, I stand on the sidelines

Cheering on the players

Today, I am a fan

Applauding the actors

Today, I am a praise singer

Singing the praises of others

Today, I am a member of the audience

Awed by spectacular performances

I stand unfazed by all these

For I know tomorrow will be different

Till then,

I will hope cheerfully

Celebrate completely

Adore lovingly

Work honestly

For one day,

I shall also be celebrated

Today, I follow

Tomorrow, I shall be followed.

THE INTERN

In a bid to escape boredom

I have sacrificed freedom

Of expression, the apparel of responsibility

A depiction of formality

Lies on my back

The beige, the grey, the black

Gone too soon are the soap ops and flip flops with socks

The strut of nonchalance and dreadlocks

A perfect formal environment

Perfect for my enrollment

Into adulthood

And into the learned brotherhood

Owing to greed

Concealed under a façade of need

I have gotten more than I bargained

For there appears there is no gain, my patience strained

Here I am the intern

At a firm reputed as the best

Surrounded by a collection of books which are the latest

All faces smiling, mine stern

In my head are numerous figures

Calculations of the day's rigors

Yet from the whisper of a little bird

I hear we volunteer our service

We ought to be exorcised from the myopic mindset of the herd

To consider this a privilege and lay to rest every scintilla of avarice

We are advised on the need for hard work

If we indeed desire to join the learned flock

The need for an extra mile

The thought of an extra mile without a dime tastes like bile

How will I survive I wonder

If I'm hurt, this profession will not go under

I know for certain that I am no saint

The embers of my finances are rapidly growing faint

I promise to throw in the towel soon

Better is it to spend my holidays gazing at the moon

Than to come all the way

Gain little experience, stare and starve all day.

MOMENTS

It's all about the moments;

Of strength, of weakness

Of hope, of despair

The good, the bad

The happy and the sad

The ennui, the activity

The boldness and timidity

Hubris and humility

Blindness and moments of clarity, the nostalgia

The euphoria

The words, the silence and everything in between

A rare combination of opposites giving clarity and beauty

Since the beginning like night and light

Creating a chemically pure, carefully synchronized moment

Replete with harmony and perfect symphony

The ripples, the cracks, the scars, the bumps all beautiful

Sometimes, good may be bad and bad may be good

Left could be right and right could lead left

Leaving one left right in the middle and there is no middle ground

Sometimes up could be down and down could be up

And up pulls us down while down lifts us up

Sometimes, upside down could be downright upright

It's all about the moments, the moments that attempt define us.

REALITY

In the real world, all things are possible

Success is probable

In the real world, certain forces unseen are indomitable

Fact is stranger than fiction

In the real world, some things are constant

Success can be in an instant while failure is not distant

Reality is about self-discovery

Reality is about quick recovery

Reality is that which we face, tomorrow it becomes outdated

Reality is that which may or may not be anticipated

Reality and the present are brothers

Time begets them all and others

Reality is the entity in which we live

Reality is the entity we cannot relive

Reality is that which drops you two steps below your dream

It keeps you in suspense as it takes you to a different realm

The world is a stage and we are merely players

It works not in accord with reason

We are kept in awe of its perfectly woven and exquisite bodice

With overbearing influence and unquestionable power

Some things we must accept

Some things we must change

Some other things are best left to reality

BLOODSHOT

I have drunk my fill from the streams of ennui

Chilled white wine, a panacea

It is my desire to get drowned in

My sea of thought

My face reeks of indifference

Telling tales of disinterest

Occasioned by circumstance

The intricately woven fabric of happenstance

In life, one cannot but embrace one's lot

Be it good or bad or bloodshot

A victim of the keen edges of life

This mentality is named mediocre

Or rather, below it

Everything seems to be wrong

No achievement worth boasting of

A life unworthy of envy

And that is just putting it mildly

Everyone who is anyone has left me to my company

Now that there are thorns in my way

There are no friends here today

Nonetheless, it has not always been this way

There was a time all roads lead to my home

I was just as honored as a philosopher's tome

I thought I was loved

And held in such high esteem

Owing to the numerous accolades and awards

The fleet of cars

The bevy of ladies

The pride of life.

I had all money could buy

Everything my heart desired, I acquired

Trust proved to be my undoing

My fair lady with much cajoling

Wooed all senses off me

And railroaded me to my doom

This school called life has taught me well

My experiences I live to recount

I thought at this age it would be done by another

In life, one cannot but embrace one's lot

Be it good or bad or bloodshot

CONFINEMENT

Confined to a cell

A prison cell with four walls

Painted once

Faded colours of what was once blue

Beyond the iron bars we have for windows

I catch a glimpse

Of the clear blue sky, the white clouds

The illumination the sun gives to both

How beautiful!

For a moment

Awash with a sense of peace

Transported to a different time and place

The time I held my baby in my hands

Holding her up against the deep blue sky

Watching as the wind toyed carelessly with her hair

As she flashed me a smile

Oh! That smile that made the sun

Dim out in envy

With two front teeth beginning to sprout, four in number

She did not seem to care

She had more than four reasons to be happy

She had me and her mother

Candy in hand

Above all, she had my heart

Till my heart was ripped into uncountable pieces

As I watched my baby

Drenched in her own blood

Raped to death

By a gang of neighborhood thugs high on some cheap substance

They paid dearly

They all paid dearly

I did not stop

Till my hands were soaked and dripping

With the blood of those who took away, Joy

Sitting on the floor

Awash with a sense of peace

Starring into the skies

For you, Joy

I will do it all over again

TRAUMA

Ashamed, weak and alone

I hear something; it cannot be, the echo of his baritone

With a snigger on his lips he struts in

Viciously purposeful are his strides with eyes as black as sin

The earth trembles under his feet, my heart shatters under his gaze

Eeriness engulfs the marrow of my bones, my sight in a haze

I am exposed, my feet have failed me, I have fallen

Before my very eyes, my life has crumbled all of a sudden

Incandescent with rage, yet helpless in this cage

This nightmare must have its end methinks, but this is no stage

This is my tale of woe

For fate has treated me as a foe

Stripped of dignity

Robbed of the pride of feminity

As numerous as the stars so lies the magnitude of my sorrows

From my belly, the demons are released, a legion with arrows

Over and over again, he thrusts his dagger into my loin

I want no more, I plead

A wince escapes heavy lips; then, he calls his gang to join

In this despoiling process, in this degrading journey

Papa! Mama! Where thou art, I am undone

Cursed be the day I was born

For I never asked to see this morn'

Into this frost with no shelter am I thrust

Where shall I go, in whom shall I trust?

Here on my back I lie, starring numbly at the ceiling

With a body in desperate need of healing

Which would cement as one, heart and soul

HOPE

Clinging desperately to hope

The rope keeping my heart from falling

From crashing like the chandelier that once dangled from the ceiling

The ceiling, my expectations were once there

Clinging desperately to hope

To cope with harsh, cruel reality

Preserving sanity

Sanity in the midst of crisis

Clinging desperately to hope

I mope silently replacing troubling thoughts with peace

Peace, the sound of many waters

Peace like a river

Clinging desperately to hope

The hope of better days

Brighter tomorrows

Tomorrow, another day to hope

KEEP ON

We must keep on keeping on

Sacrificing all on the altar of

Life

We must keep on

Hoping

Even on days our hopes are dashed

We must keep on

Believing

Even at times when everything seems like a lie

We must keep on

Living

Day in

Day out

A DANCE IN THE RAIN

It is a cold world

A cold life,

A cold day

I am alone in this cold dark world

I look around as my fears come to life

I am alone

Some races one must run alone

Some songs one must sing solo

Then I remember my maker

In whom I reposed much trust

In whom I placed confidence

That He would never fail me

Looking onto these times

It seems like my prayers

Did not go beyond the ceiling

It seems like I mumbled

Incoherencies to the wind

It seems like my pleas fell

On deaf ears

With bitter cries of lamentation

I look up

But the rain beats me more

Showers run down my face

As though in a hurry

I am in the rain

Hopeful for warmth

Pleading for mercy

No help seems to come my way

Today, it seems like fortune has turned its back on me

Hope has left me to my company

Nonetheless, it has not always been this way

It would amount to sheer ingratitude

If I claim not to have had my share of good times;

Of companionship,

Of love,

Of warmth,

Of laughter

The thought of those times

Which now seem like an age ago

Cracks the hardness of my face

With a smile

And brings consolation anew

To this weary heart of mine

Though I am knocked down

I choose to get back up

Though it stings

Though it hurts

I refuse to be broken to a point of despair

I refuse to work myself up to a state

Of despondency and disrepair

Probably my maker's delay is not denial

For I know it is He who sends good times and bad

There is a witness in my heart

That though I walk a lonely road

Bearing my cross on my shoulders

With a tear filled face

With eyes that have seen better days

I am not alone

I wish I did not feel so much strength

I wish I could feel just as miserable

As my present situation demands

As one without hope

Even in my weakness

I am convinced

I am not one without hope

Though I walk in the rain

Drenched and soaked

Cold and shivering

I shall keep warm

Amidst this storm

For life is not a bed of roses

It is not a basket of thorns either

I can no longer find the words to say

For I have prayed every prayer I know to pray

I have done all I know to do

All days are not sunny

All days are not stormy

All days are not rainy days

As seasons come, seasons go

Thus, I shall listen to the music of raindrops

Upon roofs,

Upon cars

Upon the earth

I shall combine them with the beat of my heart

I shall create my own rhythm

With the voluntary movement of my feet

All bony and wretched with age

I shall create my own dance steps

I shall dance and dance

I shall dance till I can dance no more

I shall dance

Till my knees grow feeble

Till my feet grow numb

All the energy I possess within

I shall expend

If life no longer gives me a reason to dance and be merry

I shall create one for myself

For I have the right to be happy

A right night cannot rob me of

I refuse to wallow in self-pity

Bemoaning fate's cruelties

I am pressed down

Not crushed

Wounded not forsaken

When times are good

I am glad

When times grow bad

I choose not to be sad for I know

All will be well

This is the confidence I have

In hope that never fails!

MAKANJUOLA*

Darkness too thick to be called darkness

Emptiness, void

Nothing seems to make sense

Yet from the darkness, hope speaks

Makanjuola

How do I explain to hope?

That I have waited for far too long

How do I explain to patience?

What it means to be hopeless

How do I make sense of nonsense?

How do I weave hope from nothing?

From the abyss, hope speaks again

Makanjuola

You do not understand

Allow me to explain

Aremu is a successful cocoa farmer

Akanni is a successful basket weaver

We belong to the same age grade

How do I explain to baami?*

That it is not yet time to enjoy the fruit of his labour

Or to Yeye*

That the yam she has prepared for many years is not yet done

Ah! Eewo!*

An anomaly of the highest caliber

An abomination of the finest timber

How do I explain to Ayanfe?*

That it is still not time to pay her bride price

While I watch her youth blow out

Like burnt firewood abandoned after use

After many years of failed promises

And whispers of love under the mango tree

They say money is not everything

Oh! How I wish it were true

In a soft breath, hope speaks again

Makanjuola;

Be patient with yourself

Be not too eager for wealth

It will come in its own time

At the end of the day

A word remains enough for the wise

No! You do not understand

You only think you know

But you do not understand what it means

To move from disappointment to disappointment

From failure to failure

Like a pattern drawn on adire*

Sometimes in unending circles revolving round and round

Sometimes like parallel lines that may never meet

Have I offended the gods?

Or committed an unpardonable sin

What is my crime?

I have planted my seeds in season

And watered them well

I have neither been indolent nor slothful

In trade or in business

I have paid my dues

And paid them well

And this is what I get

As reward for work

Barely having enough to eat

Scraping and toiling

With no end in sight

Is this what virtue is all about?

The nobility of character

What is the use of hope?

Is it edible?

It will get better

Things will change

How do they know it will get better?

Do they not know it can also get worse?

Or do things only change for the better?

In a voice now firm

Hope speaks again

Makanjuola.

---

* Makanjuola (Yoruba) means “Do not be too eager for wealth”

* Baami (Yoruba) means “My father”

* Yeye (Yoruba) means “Mother”

* Eewo (Yoruba) means “abomination”

* Ayanfe (Yoruba) means “Fiancée” or “Beloved”

* Adire (Yoruba) is a locally made fabric indigenous to Nigeria particularly the Yoruba’s. Patterns are drawn on the fabric to beautify it

CHOICES

In life, easier is it to descend than to ascend

Pains taking

Utterly laborious

Sometimes, you take one step forward

Two steps back if not more

Other contemporaries lie in the fore

While for you, the struggle continues

One step forward

Two steps back

Easier is it in life to descend than to ascend

All muscles ache from hard work

Yet the destination still seems miles away

How tough climbing up is

Fears and uncertainty the next step

What lies ahead I wonder

How will I handle the next step I ponder?

Innumerable strings of what ifs and if not's

On the stair way

On the stair case of life

Weary am I of this flight

I wish I could take a break

It would indeed slow me down

But in life, speed is nothing

Life is too long a race

To spend on the fast track

In this marathon called life

Speed is nothing

Endurance is everything

Oh! My consolation

A pat on my back

With my own hands

A resounding mantra

Speed is nothing

Endurance is everything

In this marathon called life

Oh! My peers seem way ahead

I look with an envious eye

They seem to have it easier than I

I chastise myself

What has become of my morality?

And self-discipline

But can one chastise oneself

For appreciating the fine things of life

Oh! May the next step bring me closer

To the finer things of life

The next…

Oh! My knee

A sharp pain!

Sharper than the sting of six needles

Simultaneous

As a session of blood transfusion

I lost focus

So I fell

Then I ask myself

Can't I lose focus and regain balance?

Would it be asking for too much?

To request for such

The innumerable voices

Of my pristine companions

Of noble thoughts

Of my orientation

Of religion

Of dogma

Recollecting a genealogy of acceptable norms

And unacceptable ones

Oh! Puh-lease

Spare me the lecture

Life is too long a walk

To always play by the rules in the book

Life is too long a journey to walk alone

So long a song to sing solo

I know all these

Or so I think

So do many like me

The lofty ideals and virtues

All admirable, laudable, enviable even

Truth be told, this walk is rough

This race is tough

A pressing need, a burning desire

To find a short cut

A back door

On second thought,

What balm will soothe conscience?

What form of oratory will abet guilt?

When I come face to face before the temple of justice

What excuse will I give?

For an act of cowardice

How can I bend conscience?

And established truth of ancient origin

To suit ignoble purposes

Shall I blame society?

Or the circumstances of my birth?

Shall I blame the avaricious and capricious?

For an absence of compassion

Or altruism,

Shall I blame my maker?

Shall I level fault upon my mother?

What balm shall soothe conscience?

When I go to bed

Viewing nightmares in night vision

The endless strings of what ifs and if not's

The regrettable past

Uncertain tomorrows

Who shall I blame for my predicament?

But myself

Though for success I thirst

I shall choose above all to put this first

In the words of the sage

There is no pillow as soft as a clear conscience

The pains taking and laborious route

I choose

The right path,

It may not always put food on the table

Or clothes on my back

A roof over my head

Or even shoes on my feet

Though I may drench my pillow

Even in my own stream of tears

I shall come blameless

Before the One in whom there is no darkness

This path have I chosen

With tears in my eyes

And a sting on my flesh

I declare

I shall do what is right

With all my might, even though it turns my day into night

JUDGE ME NOT

I am just as ordinary as the word suggests

I am just as ordinary as you

A product of my choices

Bad choices

Susceptible to virtue and vice

But I chose the latter

Just when I thought I had lost it all

Just when I hit the floor

With a loud fall

Just when I thought it was all over

I found a ray of hope

A streak of faith

That I never knew existed

I knew I could not give up

Not now

Not ever

I have made wrong choices all my life

Chose bad company over good ones

I have said the wrong things all my life

Done wrong things over good ones

But I have found faith

Or rather, faith found me

I found hope

But rather, hope found me

As I walk through the street

I hear whispers

I hear scoffs

I feel the throbbing of my nerves

As I take a walk

Adjudged guilty by the faces I see

Feeling more naked

Than sand

Like dirt

Treated as one less than human

Don't you see, I am just like you

Cut me and see, I bleed just like you

Beat me and see I'll cry just like you

Only my choices and circumstances make me different from you

Not less, only different

These emotions must be expunged

In a bid to stay sane

I have done wrong

I know

I do not expect a royal reception

Into the world of normal people

I do not expect a pity party either

I just expect some empathy

From a heart that understands

Some understanding

From people, imperfect and flawed like me

Who have made mistakes

And were given a second chance at life

For we all are just ordinary people

Such is not a justification for doing wrong

Or for causing pain

Those stares return me to status quo

Evoking stirrings I have for long laid low

I choose to be better

I choose not to disappoint

Faith

I choose not to disappoint

Love

I choose not to disappoint

Hope that believed in me

When no one else did

Hope that rid me even of myself

I know for certain that I am no saint

I have indeed repented of my deeds in the past

I am willing to forge ahead fast

I have been condemned by the ultimate judge!

So judge me not

This is all I ask

For a guilty conscience needs no accuser.

BATTLEFIELD

Fighting against the tempestuous current

Fighting a war that may never end

On the battlefield

Of a flowing river

Do you not know?

Water has no enemy

Seems like a battle long lost

Like a voyage which ended before sail

This battlefield must be conquered!

This battle must be won

Caught in a crossfire between faith and doubt

Like a pendulum tilting back and forth

The waves, heavy in their stride have come

The trembling of the winds to the wings

The rains have drowned the sky clear

Like a reservoir hurriedly emptied out

It is not a battle for the faint hearted

I caught my heart skip a beat

I found my knees buckled almost in retreat

Yet, in the midst of the storm I felt a heart beating and ready

The scent was a mixture of adrenaline and dread

I knew it was time, the moment had arrived

Armed with hope as a shield and faith as a buckler

Against the elements, may my feet not fail me now

ADVOCATE

There is a voice that speaks for us

In places we cannot speak for ourselves

The voice of the only one worthy

To be called, Advocate

There is a voice that cries out in the wilderness

Of grief and despair

Speaking soothing words of hope and peace

In the midst of the storm called crisis

There is a voice that calms turbulence

Everything makes perfect sense when He speaks

Advocate,

The one continually pleading on our behalf

There is a voice in His blood

Speaking better things than everything else

Soaked in the blood of His voice

I can no longer hear mine, his voice speaks for me

NOTHING BUT A MEMORY

One day, we will be nothing but a memory

Nothing, but a tear and a sigh

Nothing, but a simple word of prayer

Nothing, but one minute of silence

Nothing, but food for fishes and worms

Nothing, but ashes scattered on the ocean

Nothing, but a vapour in the wind

One day, we will be nothing but manure in the garden

Nothing, but a story on the lips

For generations yet unborn and for many more to come

One day, we will be dead and gone

To be seen no more

One day, in due time the end will come

One day, we all will be nothing but a memory

SOMETIMES

Sometimes, I do not know

Whether to envy the dead

Or to pity them

Caught in a cross fire between ecstasy and depression

Sometimes, I do not know

Whether to laugh or cry

Sometimes, I do not know

Whether to stand

Or to sit

Sometimes, life gets too hard even to stand

Sometimes, I do not know

Anything for certain

If tomorrow will be better than today

Sometimes, it is safe not to hope

Sometimes, I do not know

And I do not want to know

Knowing brings a burden I am unwilling to bear

Sometimes, ignorance is a blessing

DAILY

I see people die daily

I see others cry at their wake

I see the pain

I feel the anguish

In the eyes of the mother who just lost her child

In the eyes of the child who just lost his father

In the eyes of the wife who just lost a partner

Moved even to a point of tears

Then I ask myself

Who the tears are for

For the one who died in his prime?

Or for those he left behind

I see people die daily

My eyes are green with envy

They escaped!

The storms and troubles of the world

I see people die daily

I know, they are not to be pitied

Only the living deserve pity

OLAYIMIKA*

Non sibi sed aliis*

Not for self but for others

As I utter those words most profound

The motto of a beloved alma mater

Thinking about the power of words

The power of love

To transform and reform

I smile, at the thought of you

Fondly remembered you are

Not for self but for others

Only few people find fulfillment in life

Many all too often

Looking in the wrong direction

But you,

You found a life of service

And never lost it

Unburdened by the complexity in setting many goals

You only set one, to serve

The nobility of a fast diminishing kind

Not for us but for others

It's funny how words change our lives

It's funny how people shape our lives

You shaped mine, you changed mine

I think of how much you achieved

Not the laurels but the values instilled

Grilled through the fire of discipline and truth

Only a few find fulfillment in life

And you are one of those people

You are remembered today and everyday

Non sibi sed aliis

---

*Olayimika (Yoruba) is a name meaning , wealth surrounds me

* Non sibi sed aliis (Latin) means "not for self but for others"

LOSS

Words too deep to be spoken

Only silence conveys the message

Thoughts too deep to be uttered

For it can never be understood by another

Pains that run too deep to be expressed

As no medium of expression will suffice

Faces too familiar to be forgotten

Today and every day, forever and always

The words haven't been formed yet

No words can convey the depth of emotion

I have tried and failed

Unable to muster the strength to try again

The heaviness in the heart

The weight of a ton

The confusion in the mind

Is this real?

A cocktail of pity, pain and regret

Served on a cold tray

Pain, Loss

No warmth, no words

Starring at nothing

As hot tears run down the cheeks

Amidst trembling lips

Some wounds may never heal

A feeling called loss

May our paths never again cross

Till I am no more

Gone with the wind

To a place of rest

Of peace, of security

Away from the reach of wanton cruelty

Then, there will be nothing left to loose.

DEATH BY SELF

Elusive hope

Shattered dreams

Broken trust

Disappointment after disappointment

Blissful death

Freedom!

Death by self

An end in sight

The stage is set

A chair and rope audience

A second thought

Sweaty palms

A sign!

I need a sign

A knock on the door maybe

A cry of a baby

Can anybody hear?

The cry of my heart

Can anybody see?

Eyes drenched in blood

Does anybody care?

If I live or die

The honk of the horn

The swiftness of their strides

Nobody cares!

The stage is set

There is no going back

Death by self

ONCE UPON A TIME

Once upon a time

You were the sun my earth revolved around

My sun, moon and star

Once upon a time

You were the one I could not do without

From sunrise to sunset

The thought of you accompanied me through many days and nights

Your presence was heaven to me

The haven I always craved for

You were my addiction

A slave of free volition

To a love I professed as true

Till you broke my heart into unmendable pieces

Till you ruptured my trust like unwanted fetus

Aborted before its time

You took the ground off my feet

Watched me fall

Pushed me out of your ship

Watched me sink

Broken courtship unfulfilled promises

Till I learnt how to swim against the currents

Till I learnt how to stand on my own two feet

Till I learnt how to choose me over you

Once upon a time

I cared enough to do all to keep you

Till I could no longer recognize my own face in the mirror

Till I could no longer hear my own voice

Once upon a time

I was naïve enough to believe in the love professed and never practiced

The one hidden within the heart without showing

All I saw were fists and stars

Which left bruises in their wake

The news of your passing met me indifferent

I felt nothing

No remorse, no pity, no sadness

Not even guilt for being so cold

Only peace

You died long before today

Once upon a time

INFATUATION GONE SOUR

What are you, fiend or friend?

Does this signal the end?

Of something we once had

A hunk of a lad

My hopes in the air you hung

Now I sing a melancholy song

You have reduced my heart to rubble

It no longer does bubble

You do not deserve my tears

You tried using me to scratch your itch

Using to your advantage my fears

That which I cherish most is now beyond your reach

Now every listening ear would hear

Of things we spoke in the rear

You thought I was a fool

You could use as a tool

No longer am I bound by your spell

The possibility of you leaving me I now dispel

The die is cast

You now belong to my past.

HAPPY EVER AFTER

Like bees to honey

Do they flock around me

With lips that speak promises

All in the heat of passion

The mesmerizing effect of a fair face

I can tell from experience is short lived

With time, they would prove to be just like the rest

I would be left with a wound to nurse

And a scar as a reminder

This one in particular seems rather adamant

I figure it is in his character never to give up

As stubborn as a mule

In milder terms, perseverance is its name

He pours his heart out

And rends it bare

Unashamed at the sight of onlookers

Undaunted by the scoffs of mockers

This one does not behave like the rest

He seems to know what he wants

And is unwilling to take no for an answer

With arched brows and arms folded beneath

My breasts, an intimidating pose if I may say so myself

I see into his eyes

From his conduct, I begin to reconsider

And psyche myself up into naivety

Releasing voluntarily into vulnerability

In time, I discover it is his vocation

To win hearts and conquer beauties

Mine has been no exception

In time, I have learned, there is no perfect man

There are no perfect love stories

And indeed, there are no happy ever afters

Should I for fear of being the fool

Refuse to love again?

To live is to love

To love is to hurt

The pain comes as a joint package with love

One without the other is void

Just as joy complements sadness

And wherever night is day is not far behind

So love without pain is blind

STALEMATE

Girl.

You played me clean like a fiddle

How I did fall is cryptic and a riddle

My heart I served on a platter

With your words you hyped and did flatter

But my lucidity came too late

I take my bow with audacity and resignation to fate

You are not to blame for your charming demeanour

I must confess as to matters of the heart I am but a minor

You took advantage of my naivity and flexibility

You are not to blame for my charity and stupidity

I bear no grudge as I do not judge

For I know sooner or later karma will upsurge

With no pretense

What do you have to say in your defense?

Guy

You should have known from the outset that it was a game

Your tactics were lame all the same you brought me fame

My movement which was rigid and languid

Made you feverish and you became fervid

You were high on my love like liquor

The taste you savoured in your mouth was of quality flavour

Because of this effect I have on women, I need not labour

In fairness, you were truly a worthy opponent

For winning, I'm due for enthronement

I guess it's time to lay all the cards on the table

I'll render it nice and simple

Because I know your understanding is impeccable

Out of the multitude I chose you for ephemeral pleasure

You were a lyre I played during my leisure

I raised your hopes high and my presence gave your palpitations

You spoke about me with enthusiasm boasting to friends and relations

We strolled through the park with arms entwined

Into submission you succumbed without a whine

What I did is no crime

And I would have gotten my full prize if not for time

I see hatred in your eyes, it burns like a flame

Hey don't hate the player, hate the game.

Girl.

You take pride in your achievement of making me fall

Little do you know the possibility of you leaving me I did forestall

The future through foresight I did envisage

You tried making me believe a mirage

I accept that at relationships I lack experience

But what I can see sitting you can't see standing on a fence with a lens

You did your homework well; your moves were calculated and strategic

As it appears, in the end, your game play is near pathetic

I may appear simple but in actual fact I am enigmatic

I deliberately decided to play the role of the hurt

So sooner or later you would admit your fault

I didn't want to play hard to get

Because the bigger they are the harder they fall lest you forget

On hearing my words, your face has become pale

Stop playing the role of the victim those moves are stale

To every listening ear I will tell the tale

Of how due to your stupidity you did fail

You thought of yourself as being as dangerous as a lynx

Guess what, I've broken your jinx

Guy.

Good one hon, you are trying to resort to self defence

By saying you did everything in the name of false pretence

Tell the truth for I am starting to get bored

Admit it, you know I rock your world.

Girl.

He, who laughs last, laughs best

Like those before you, you failed the test

In this game there is no last or first

You did not deal with me on a clean slate

Be gone, for this is a stalemate

TO MY UNBORN CHILD

Part 1.

My beloved child

Tender and mild

The world you are coming into is full of ups and downs

Crowns and thorns

Twists and turns

Ups and downs

Life is full of times both happy and sad

Good and bad

Life is an irony

Full of people both real and phony

In life, people rise and fall

Whether smart or dull

Part 2.

As I look at the rise in my belly

Ah! You kicked again

Oh! My beloved child

I will try my best to keep you

From harms way

To safeguard you from the clutches

Of hardship

But remember, there is only little I can do

I can only show you the path which you should trail

But I recognize the value of a will of steel

I shall steer your course

In a way I believe is right

In the path of light

My beloved child! I shall make mistakes

I shall upset you

Come what may

Always remember,

This womb carried you in discomfort

And bore you in pain

These breasts fed your suckling lips

These hands wiped your tears

And held you close

This heart wishes you well

Wherever you go

I may not always be with you

But I will always love you

All my love I give to you

For love is all I have to give

Oh dearest! I hope it will

Be enough for you

I hope you will not despise your mother

When she cannot meet all your needs

For love does not pay the bills

It only turns a world of gloom into a happy one

SILENT CONVERSATION

Your eyes speak the language of our humanity

A symbol of our race

Indeed you are human

Gazing into your eyes, aqua clear

Seeing them open and close

As a well-used door

Your toothless gum

As empty as a parking lot at midnight

With eyes that flood your new clothes

Breaking the silence

With the noise of your cries

The cries that bring a smile to my lips

And joy to my heart

The cries that cause a burst of laughter in the room

All and sundry stand transfixed

Smiling without cause

While your cries break the silence

After a long wait

Coupled with excruciating pains of labour

The most dreadful day of my life

Has turned out to be

The most unforgettable

Because you made it so

I call you- beautiful

You caused me so much pain

Now you have brought me so much joy

Never again will I be called barren

Or mocked in the market square

Time stands still in your eyes

Gazing, lost in time

Wiping the sea of your tears with my hands

I can stare at you for an age and not grow weary

Beautiful I call you

Beautiful is what you are

Beautiful is who you are

Finally in my hands

The endless wait is over

The beautiful one is now born

LITTLE STRANGER

Biting at the nipple

With closed eyes

Fragile frame

Vulnerable, defenseless

A constriction lies within my heart

Maternal instincts aroused

You bring out a side of me

That I never knew existed

The need to protect

The need to shelter

The need to watch over

Now I know what it means to be

A mother

I owe it all to you my child

Hello! Little stranger

You seem very much alien to this world

Exclaiming with loud cries of lamentation

You seem very much afraid

Not knowing what to do

You mean to speak

Not knowing what to say

Looking for a familiar heart that feels what you feel

Waiting for an ear to listen to your voice

The voice of your pain

Pain expressed in tears

Tears that reveal your fears

Fears of uncertainty

The uncertainty of the future

One day, when you are all grown

You'll know the meaning of the words

I understand

I'll be your cook and your nurse

I'll sing to you and hold you close

I'll always pray for you, more than I do for myself

I'll care for you

You are mine

Mine, my seed

My baby, my child

Ecstatic, elated

You are here

Do not be afraid

I will be here

For you, with you

Beside you

Always remember

Mama is here.

VOICES

As much as we pride ourselves in our uniqueness, the stories of others create in us awareness of the fact that we are not so different after all. The knowledge of this enables us to identify in a certain degree to the pain of another; their loss and their struggles.

From the mundane activities of daily living to the extra-ordinary achievement of a victorious life, "Voices" meets each person at the stage they are in life, telling tales of triumph and defeat, hope and despair, joy as well as pain. Capturing moments with words and encapsulating shared experiences in lines. A combination of opposites, it presents a spectrum filled with intense emotion and contrast.

A book of poems which runs like a line from the beginning to the end written in various styles over a period of time, from free verse to an observance of the conventional rhyme scheme. The voices are fresh and are above all true to life.

I found my voice somewhere entangled within yours

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Voices by Yewande Adebowale

VOICES

by

Yewande Adebowale

A COLLECTION OF POEMS; POEMS THAT TELL STORIES